Decision to take over Sears store has spawned no regrets for women

One Sunday night in the summer of 1979, Paige Nolen and Lola Jackson were sitting at Paige's kitchen table discussing whether they should form a business partnership. The Sears Catalogue Store in Triangle Plaza was in need of management, and the women had been invited to take the job.

After considerable debate, they decided to accept the task of running the store. "We decided, 'heck, let's give it a try,'" notes Paige. "It's a decision we haven't regretted."

Paige had worked at a Sears store in Georgia during the mid 1960s, and had worked as a secretary off and on since that time. Lola was working with her husband at his place of business, the Carpet House. But neither had ever managed a business.

"When we first started, people were very kind and patient with us while we got used to the business," Paige says.

Lola recalls with amusement the night she and Paige met the Sears delivery truck to unload some merchandise.

"It was right after we had started in the business," says Lola. "We decided we were going to do things right. We were going to meet the delivery truck at the store to unload our merchandise."

That particular night was the truck driver's first on the delivery route which included the Appomattox store. He had been told that the new managers of the store would meet him to unload the shipment in the wee hours of the morning. But, he had not been told that they were women.

"You wouldn't believe the look on his face when two women got out of the car to meet him," Lola recalls with a laugh. "He kept offering to unload the merchandise for us, but we were determined to do it ourselves. The next day, the story about the two women who met the truck driver in the dead of night to unload the truck had gotten all the way back to Greensboro, N.C. That was the last time we ever had to unload the truck."

Still, there is plenty of physical exercise for the two women in this business. "We have learned to use a handcart, and that's been a lifesaver," Paige notes.

"The physical stress is one part of the job that's not immediately obvious when you come in," Lola adds. "It's not just the lifting, but being on your feet all day, running from the front of the building to the back for an order, then running back out front, over and over again."

On a typical morning, Lola and Paige are at the store bright and early, often more than an hour before the store's 9 a.m. opening time. The time is spent hurriedly organizing shipments of new orders which have arrived, and preparing any paperwork which can be done before the store opens.

"I would say the paperwork is the most tedious of our daily routines," Lola notes. "It gets to be very frustrating when you need to be out front helping with customers, but you have to be in back getting the paperwork ready. What you see us doing out front is only about one-third of the total job."

Between October and December, when business reaches a fever pitch with the Christmas season, Paige and Lola work at the store seven days a week, and they employ part-time help to meet their customers' needs.

"Sometimes, our families suffer," Lola points out. "They have to eat a lot of hot dogs while we are busy taking care of the store. We could not do our jobs without the understanding of our families."

But the job is very rewarding to both Lola and Paige, despite its occasional trials and tribulations. Besides the satisfaction that comes from successfully running a business, the women enjoy being their own bosses.

"Being on our own, being able to set our own hours is very rewarding," says Lola. "We have each other to depend on," Paige adds. "If one of the kids is sick, I can call Lola and she can handle the store, and vice versa."

"Plus, in the summer, we can alternate days off and spend more time with the kids," Lola adds.

While these women are very self-sufficient in their store, they do graciously accept help from their husbands, Jim Nolen and Buster Jackson, when it is needed. "We like doing things on our own, but Jim and Buster help us when we need help," Paige notes. "For example, they delivered a washing machine for us last week."

"And, we still like being treated like ladies," she adds.

Both women agree that Sears is a good company to work for. And the catalogue store concept has gone over well in Appomattox.

"People like the convenience of being able to shop at home using the catalogue," Paige notes. "When their order arrives, we call them or drop a card in the mail, if we can't reach them by phone."

A teletype system has helped to reduce the length of time between order and arrival of merchandise. The

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Lola Jackson checks order on teletype machine.

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Frazier's: a friendly family store

One stop at Frazier's Furniture, TV's and Appliances, located on Rt. 460 at Oxford Furnace Hill, and it's easy to see why the business is growing by leaps and bounds. Bill and Minnie Frazier, the owners, are the friendly, down home kind of folks who enjoy their customers.

"Our business is growing," commented Bill, "We do a big business in the Appomattox area and we enjoy the folks down there."

Frazier's opened its doors for business in August of 1975 in the old "Cam" Campbell Service Station building on Route 460 near Concord. The Fraziers are both experienced in the field of appliances. Bill worked as service man for an appliance dealer for many years before opening his own business and Minnie worked as a bookkeeper for an appliance dealer for 17 years.

"When we went to see the banker about borrowing money before we opened the business," said Minnie with a smile, "I didn't know how much money we'd need and the banker didn't know. But, we came up with a figure and we were finally on our way."

"I well remember when we first opened," said Minnie. "Our first shipment of appliances got lost and our first day of business all we had was a lot of television sets!"

The Frazier's business grew and in three years, August of 1978 they opened in their present location.

The store offers a complete line of furniture, televisions, appliances, wood stoves and waterbeds.

The Fraziers have such a personal interest in their customers and their needs that when it comes time to go to the market on a 'buying spree', they invite several people along, people with different tastes in furniture and appliances.

"Always, when we buy chairs and especially recliners," said Minnie with a smile, "we take along several people of varying sizes, tall, short, fat and skinny. After all, we have to have chairs for everybody."

Helping the Fraziers take care of their customers is a son Steve, who does a little bit of everything, including deliveries, sales and service. A daughter-in-law, Mrs. William (Bo) Frazier, Vickie, keeps busy in sales and management.

"We're a family business," said Bill Frazier. "I think we have a good line of communication with each other and with our customers."

Frazier's . . . the friendly place to shop and visit!

Clayton Bryant enjoys his land

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he notes.

And, he adds, there may be a time in the not-too-distant future when Bryant begins breeding horses to race and sell. But for right now, at least, "we'll just keep training and racing the horses," Bryant says.

Perhaps the thing which appeals to Bryant most about horses is that they represent a hobby that lets him stay close to the land he so enjoys.

"I've just always been interested in real estate. I've always enjoyed land: looking at it, buying it and selling it," Bryant says.

Bryant has dealt in land all across the state of Virginia, from the Tidewater area to the far southwestern portion of the state, and even into North Carolina.

"Most of what I have right now is in this general area of the state," Bryant says. Approximately 20,000 acres of his property is currently for sale.

Before he negotiates for purchase of a tract of land, Bryant visits the site, carefully surveying the land to assess its potential as an investment. If it's farm land, he considers its value for producing crops. If it is timber land, he calculates a rough estimate of the worth of the timber.

Most of the land he buys is purchased with the intent to re-sell, with the exception of some acreage he picks up in this immediate area.

While he can only estimate how many acres he has bought and sold since he has been in the business ("I guess it's in the hundreds of thousands of acres," he says), Bryant does remember certain particularly memorable sales. "One year, in the early 1970s, we bought 22,000 acres of land in Bland County, and sold it that same year," Bryant recalls.

Bryant and Branch have since dissolved their partnership and gone into business independently, but they still retain close ties.

"We've gone down many a road together, looking at land," says Bryant. "And I have to say that I've enjoyed about every mile."

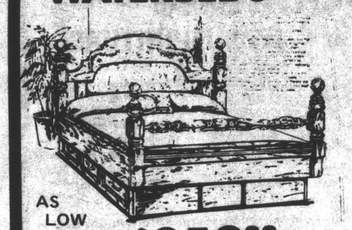
In recent years, the land market has slowed because of high interest rates and other prevailing economic conditions. But, Bryant says, things are "holding their own now," if not picking up a little.

Regardless of the status of the land market, Bryant will retain his appreciation for land, and its potential. As an illustration, he points to the land on his farm.

"If we bought that land a year before we did, we probably could have gotten it for $45 an acre," Bryant notes. "As it was, it cost about $125 an acre. It's probably worth as much as $1,000 an acre now."

"That's the thing about land," he adds. "It's always going to be valuable, and there is always going to be a demand for it. People are always going to have uses for more land."

WATERBEDS



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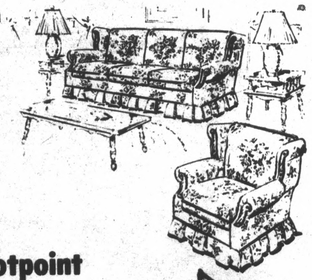

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